Mesopotamia ﻣﺴﻮﺑﻮﺗﺎﻣﻴﺎ

Issue 2 **June 2007**

The Iraqi Christian Community Representatives in the UK

Press Release

June 6, 2007

"If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."(1 Peter 4:14)

A DARK ERA FOR THE IRAQI CHRISTIANS

For the past four years, the Iraqi Christians have been targeted by a wave of attacks on their persons, churches, monasteries, homes and businesses. Different *researchers Centers* headed by Human Rights documented thousands attacks on the Christians during this period.

The Patriarch for the Chaldeans, Emmanuel III Delly, the Patriarch for the Assyrians Mar Dinkha IV, Mar Addai II and other Church leaders have come out with a strong accusation against the Iraqi authorities and foreign troops for not protecting civilians specially minorities. Mar Delly III said: "Today, Christians are persecuted in a country where everyone is fighting for their own personal interests. They have always lived in Iraq and over the years they have done everything possible to contribute to its development together with their Muslim brothers."

The ordeal of Iraqi Christians started with targeting the churches and kidnapping clegymen and civilian. On 13 of Oct. 2006 Fr. Poulous Iskandar was kidnapped and beheaded, Fr. Munthir al-saqa was shot dead. On June 3, 2007 in Mosul, Father Ragheed Ganny with three deacons was shot dead after celebrating mass. In Dora district of Baghdad, there is a systematic eradication of Christians, in which they are forced to choice one of three to pay *Jizya,* leave their house or convert to Islam. Terrors are incited by the number of Imams of the mosques *Fatwa* and other fanatics against the 'Christian infidels.'

The developments that follow will be even more serious. The frightened Christians are expecting the authorities to insure their safety, security and justice.

We ask United Nations, all peace-loving governments, Human Rights organizations and individuals to help the Christians of Iraq. The reprehensible failure of Iraq to guarantee religious freedom, justice and accountability towards the Christians simply amounts to an invitation to continue the same in the future.

Bishop Toma Dawod, Syrian Orthodox Church
Fr. Stephen Turkhan, Assyrian Church of the East
Fr. Habib JAJOU, Chaldean Catholic Mission
Rev. Dr. Khoshaba Georges, Ancient Church of the East
Fr. Nizar Semaan, Syrian Catholic Mission

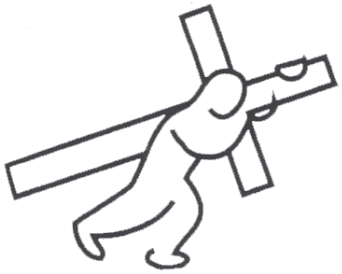
Baghdad Christian district besieged

Many flee Dora as militants insist on Islam or death

From the Chicago Tribune,

By Liz Sly, Tribune foreign correspondent; Nadeem Majeed contributed to this report

Published May 9, 2007



BAGHDAD -- Christians are fleeing in droves from the southern

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Baghdad district of Dora after Sunni insurgents told them they would be killed unless they converted to Islam or left, according to Christian leaders and families who fled.

St. George Assyrian Church in Dora. Was bombed, burned, then destroyed between 2004-2007

Similar episodes of what has become known as sectarian cleansing raged through Baghdad neighborhoods last year as Sunnis drove Shiites from Sunni areas and Shiites drove Sunnis from Shiite ones, but this marks the first apparent attempt to empty an entire Baghdad neighborhood of Christians, the Christians say.

al-Dora Sts. Peter and Paul's Church in 8/2004

The exodus began after a fatwa, or religious edict, was issued by Sunni insurgents offering Christians a stark choice: to convert to Islam and pay an ancient Islamic tax known as jizyah, or to depart within 24 hours and leave their property behind. If they did neither, they said, they faced death. Sunni gunmen have been enforcing the edict by knocking on doors, posting leaflets on walls and with a dozen or so kidnappings and a shooting -- actions that have prompted hundreds of Christians to leave an area that was once home to one of Baghdad's largest Christian communities.

The insurgents' campaign in Dora is the first major incident of sectarian cleansing since the Baghdad security plan, a centerpiece of President Bush's strategy to win in Iraq, went into effect in mid-February and extra U.S. troops began arriving in Baghdad in an effort to retake the city from insurgents and militias.

"They are talking about security plans and bringing peace, but nothing arrived in Dora. There are no rules, no government and no government forces," said Bishop Shlimon Warduni, auxiliary bishop of the Chaldean Patriarchate, the ancient Christian sect to which most of the Christians in the Dora area belong. "This is a full-scale persecution. In all of Iraq's history we didn't face a situation like this."….

Iraq's minority Christian community, put at 800,000 on the eve of the U.S. invasion, has already been greatly reduced by threats, fear and intimidation over the past four years, and as many as half of Iraq's Christians are now living outside the country, according to the latest report of the U.S. International Commission on Religious Freedom issued last week.

Church leaders estimate that half of Dora's Christian community has already fled the notoriously violent Sunni extremist stronghold in southwestern Baghdad, a community of 500,000 in which Sunnis, Shiites and Christians once lived alongside one another. Shiites have already been expelled from all but the southernmost edge of the neighborhood. Although Christians had been individually targeted, usually for ransom, as a community they had largely been ignored, residents say.

Chaldean St. Peter's Seminary in al-Dora section

Abdullah al-Noufali, head of the Christian Endowment, a state body that oversees Iraq's churches, said he had heard of many instances in which local Sunni residents had offered to help or protect their threatened Christian neighbors.

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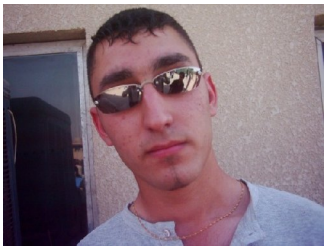
The New Iraqi Christian Martyrs (part 1)

Manhal Hanna Aboud, was shot dead in 10 May 2007	General Talal Karem Ayar, was shot dead in Bahdad in 23/5/2007	Ninos Adam Shamoel, was shot dead in 11 June 2006	Remon Faroq Shamoon, was beheaded by terors near Baghdad in 2006
Feras Mwafaq Hady, was beheaded near Baghdad in 2006	 Bassam Musab Jamil, was shot dead in Baghdad in 25 Feb 2007	Firas Younis Bajori, was shot dead in Bahdad in 21/1/2007	Abdulmaseh al-Noufaly, was shot dead in al-Anbar in 2006
Rami Sabah Francis, was shot dead in Bahdad 30/5/2006	Alaa Zuhair Ibrahim, policeman, was shot dead in Kurkok 1/7/2006	Inmar Akram Raffo, was shot dead in Mosul in 19/6/2007	Zaid Waleed al-Baraq, was shot dead in Mosul in 27/5/2007
Manhal Hanna Aboud, was shot dead in 10 May 2007	General Talal Karem Ayar, was shot dead in Bahdad in 23/5/2007	Ninos Adam Shamoel, was shot dead in 11 June 2006	Remon Faroq Shamoon, was beheaded by terors near Baghdad in 2006

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Post-Mesopotamian History (Pre-Christian Era) (2)

By Farid Oufi

the god Marduk with his dragon, from a Babylonian cylinder seal.

from http://www.hps.cam.ac.uk/readinglists/marduk.jpg

The god of Babylon, Marduk, and that of Ashur of Assyria acquired a position like that later held by Zeus in the Greek pantheon. The Babylonian religion, as many other ancient ones, was originally fertility cults. The earth-goddess, Ishtar, was supreme among female divinities. Greek colonists in Asia Minor (Turkey of today) found temples to her; they named her Artemis and took over the existing cults. A god or goddess became associated with the State and had to give, not only an abundant harvest, but victory in war. Through association with the State, the gods also became associated with morality. Lawgivers received their codes from a god, thus a breach of law became an impiety. The oldest legal code still known is that of Hammurabi, king of Babylonia (2067-2025 BC). This code was accepted by the king to have been delivered to him by Marduk.

Hammurabic codes had parallels in the Bible, or some say were comparable to the biblical laws. Proverbs and wisdom dialogues may underlie many of the apparent links between biblical and cuneiform. In 692 BC, the Assyrian king Sennacherib destroyed Babylon (lying on the Euphrates some 88km of present day Baghdad) which was noted for its luxury, its fortifications and particularly for the Hanging Gardens, the famous Ziggurat (tiered temple). Under him and his successors, Nineveh (north of Iraq today) became a city of matchless splendor, where art and literature flourished.

The local god Ashur was repositioned to occupy the same, if not a superior status to that of Marduk in Babylon. The king was the vice-regent of Ashur as well as his chief priest and that his authority rests on the command of this lord Ashur and the great gods. Sennacherib's efforts to make Marduk redundant were not followed by his successors. Esarhaddon returned the statue of Marduk to Babylon and rebuilt the temple his father destroyed. Ashur became what he always had been, the deity of the city of Ashur. His most important function was to be a focus of Assyrian identity. Ashur may have been the national deity in the times of great empires but, after the demise of the powerful Mesopotamian states, he became a relic of the past. However, Assyrians of today hold their official symbol as "the god within the sun-disc" whom they believe to be Ashur, not as a deity but as a guardian of their assumed identity[i] as they are now Christians.

Mesopotamians worshiped a pantheon of deities, including major ones like Sin but each person also had an additional, personal god. Abraham's reflections on the moon god might have led him to the idea that the world is governed by one God[ii]. Abraham may have lived sometime between 2000 and 1800 BC in Ur of the Chaldees which was famous, among other things, with a Ziggural tower, like the monumental tower of Babylon, intended to reflect traditional beliefs in the moon god Sin. Abraham is as a model of faith and pure monotheism. On the highest religious level, says Tad Szulc in the National Geographic's "Abraham the Father of three Faiths", Abraham and his monotheism was a model for Jesus and his early Christian disciples and, much later, by Muhammed and his followers. Today he still stands out as a unique spiritual figure, transcending the frontiers of great religion. However questionable the accuracy of the scriptures, however thin the archaeological and historical evidence, Jews, Christians and Muslims still revere him as the patriarch, says Szulc. We can never know, but perhaps Abraham's early experience in Ur prepared him for the spark of inspiration that carried him – and humanity – on a great journey, he added.

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SAINTS FROM MESOPOTAMIA

St. Kiriakos and his mother St. Youlete

By: Wisam Talal

The martyrdom of Youelete and her son Kiriakos is considered to be one of the greatest historical incidents that glorify the holy name of "Christian". Their martyrdom manifests the powerful grace of the Holy Spirit acting in them, and shows their great love to the saviour Jesus Christ.

Youlete was a descendant of Asian kings. She was rich, virtuous and devout. She became a widow with one son, Kiriakos.

Seleucia (near Baghdad)

When Kiriakos was three years of age, a fierce wave of persecution against Christians started. The family escaped to the city of Seleucia then to Tartoos. They were captured and fell into the hands of a blood thirsty judge.

The judge interrogated her and when he found that she was not willing to denounce her faith, he scourged her with cow's nerves in front of her child Kiriakos. With courage she bore this suffering shouting with Kiriakos "I am a Christian".

The Judge's fury arose and he threw Kiriakos on the ground so violently that caused a severe cut in his head. This injury caused Kiriakos martyrdom with his holy blood pouring down for Christ's love. This spectacle did not soften the heart of the brutal judge; instead he carried on torturing Youlete, and then ordered the executioner to behead her.

She, however, pleaded to make her last prayer first. To this request he agreed, and as she prayed something wonderful happened. The Lord raised up her soul which passed from her body to her Lord and God, where she embraced her son Kiriakos. With her son she started enjoying the ecstasies and glories of God's kingdom among the saints and angels in heaven.

Simeon bar Sabba'e

(Martyred between 339 and 344)

Simeon was (Patriarch) of Seleucia in Iraq. He died with several others in the persecution by the Persian King *Sapor*.

He said:

'Give me this crown, Lord; you know 3 how I long for it, for I have loved you with all my heart and all my being. When I see you, I shall be filled with joy and you will give me rest. I shall no longer have to live in this world and see my people suffering, your churches destroyed, your altars overthrown, your devoted clergy everywhere persecuted, the weak defiled, the lukewarm turned from the truth, and my flock that was so large reduced at the time of testing to a handful. I shall not see the many that seemed to be my friends undergo an inward change, become hostile and seek my death; or find those that were my friends for a while taken from me by persecution, at the very time when the killers are snapping their fingers at our people and lording it over them. Yet I mear to persevere in my vocation like a hero and to walk bravely along the path marked out for me, so that I shall still be an example to all your people in the east. I have had the first place at table, I will have the first place too when it c6mes to dying; I will be the first to give my blood. Then with my brethren I shall enter on that life in which there are no cares, no anxiety, no solicitude, a life where there is neither persecutor nor persecuted, neither oppressor nor oppressed, neither tyrant nor victim c threatening

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prefects shall I see there. No one there will cite me before his tribunal or upset me with repeated menaces; there will be no one to do me violence or bully me. I shall stumble no more, when once I have gained a firm footing in you, the Way we all must walk in. My weary limbs will find their rest in you, for you, Anointed, are the Oil that is to anoint us. The grief in my heart will be forgotten when I drink of you, the Chalice of our salvation. The tears in my eyes you will wipe away, Joy, Consolation.'

Before his martyrdom, after celebrating the Eucharist with his friends, Simeon prayed:

Lord Jesus, you prayed for those who had crucified you and you taught us too to pray for our enemies. Stephen, your deacon, prayed for the people who had stoned him, and you received his spirit. Receive as well the souls of our brethren, receive my spirit with them. Set us among the martyrs who have received the garland in the west, among the holy apostles and the blessed prophets, Do not count it as a sin that these men persecute your people and kill our bodies, but grant them, Lord, the grace of conversion. May they come to know that you are God and realize that you are the Lord. Bless, Lord, the towns and cities in the east which you entrusted to my care. Protect all the faithful of these lands as you would the apple of your own eye. May they find shelter under the shadow of your wings until these troubles are over. Stay with them until the consummation of the world, as you promised that you would. Bless, Lord, this city, the city o our capture and our crowning. May your cross keep it true to the faith, now and for ever, age after age Amen.

2000 years of Prayer compiled by MICHAEL COUNSELL (Canterbuty Press, Norwich, 1988). P. 15-16

The Pontifical Babel College

The Pontifical Babel College for Philosophy and Theology was founded in 1991, by a decree of

His Beatitude Mar Raphael I Bidawid, in agreement with the Chaldean Synod. It is situated in Ankawa, Arbil, next to the Chaldean St. Peter's Seminary.

Its aim is to provide a higher scientific education for priest-students, monks, nuns and interested lay people, in the Middle-East, and especially in Iraq. The Pontifical Babel College have developed a method of work in ecumenical openness for the Eastern Churches traditions, in the context of the Mesopotamian Civilizations, and tries to present modern outlooks for the present day, but on basis of sound scientifical Bible studies and traditional theology, with specialization in the different fields of interest (Philosophy, Liturgy, Canon-law ...).

The Pontifical Babel College was recognized and affilliated with the Pontifical Urbanian University,

Rome, Italy in 1997, on an experimental basis for 5 years since 15/11/2000.

The Pontifical Babel College is also a member of Association of Theological institutes of the Middle-East, which have a center in the Lebanon, since 1994.

Bishop Jacques ISAAC

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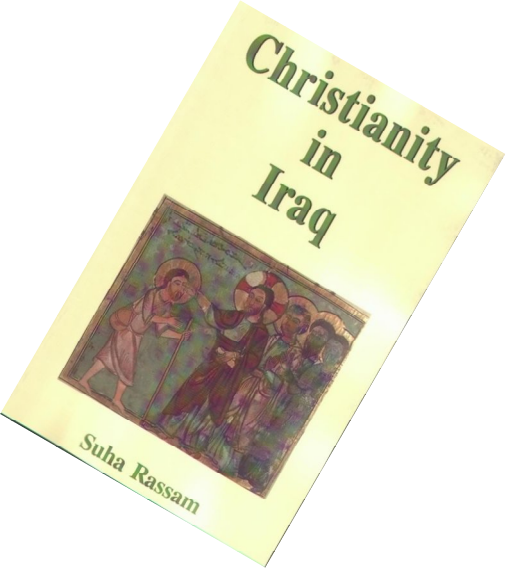

Suha Rassam

As Iraq has come to the forefront of world news, it is important not to forget its significance in the development of early Christianity. Dr Suha Rassam follows the birth and development of the Christian community in Mesopotamia over the centuries to the modern state of Iraq and the present situation of Iraqi Christians. It is a fascinating and complex story, expertly told.
www.gracewing.co.uk

Charity according to Jacob of Serugh (5th Century)

Translated by Fr. Habib J.

O fasting believer, invite the needy and offer him bread.
Do not wait for him to come to you asking,
but instead you go to him and attend to his needs.
Because the fields will not go to their farmers but it is the farmers themselves who take the seeds and strive to do the planting.
And if a needy knocked on your door, do not say: I pray for God to give you, because such a statement is useless and has no grace or blessed returns.
Instead, you should share with him what God has given you and address him gently and kindly, for he knows better than you do whose grace it is.

Prayers for peace in Iraq

The following prayer authored by Christian, Jewish and Muslim clergy was used in many places in inter-religious worships around the time of the Gulf War in 1991:

**Eternal God, Creator of the universe,
there is no God but You.
Great and wonderful are Your works,
wondrous are your ways.
Thank You for the many splendoured
variety of Your creation.
Thank You for the many ways we affirm
Your presence and purpose,
and the freedom to do so.
Forgive our violation of Your creation.
Forgive our violence toward each other.
We stand in awe and gratitude for Your
persistent love
for each and all of Your children:
Christian, Jew, Muslim,
as well as those with other faiths.
Grant to all and our leaders attributes of
the strong;
mutual respect in words and deed,
restraint in the exercise of power, and
the will for peace with justice, for all.
Eternal God, Creator of the universe,
there is no God but You. Amen.
(Excerpted from *Current Dialogue*
24/93, p.36)**

The Mar Elia Monastery

Location: 4 miles south-west of Mosul north of Iraq, cared for by: The Chaldean Church. The monastery was established in the 6th century about 571 AD by Mar Elia who previously lived a monastic life at a great monastery at the Ezla Mountain (Tur-Abedeen south of Turkey.

It remained a successful center of Christianity until 1743 when the Persian Nadir Shah attacked the region, partially destroyed the monastery and murdered its inhabitants. It was renovated during world war.

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The Churches of Iraq in the Twentieth Century

I. The Church of the East
The original indigenous Church of Mesopotamia. Became independent of other Western Churches in 424AD.
Split into two main branches in 1964:
1-The Assyrian Church: Those who follow the Gregorian Calendar.
2. The Ancient Church of the East: Those that follow the original Julian Calendar.

II. The Syrian Orthodox Church
The Church that evolved among the Syriac speaking Christians in Syria and Northern Mesopotamia who rejected the decisions of the council of Chalcedon and who became separated from the body of the Western Church.

III. The Roman Catholic Churches
1. The Chaldean Church: Those members of the Church of the East who united with the Roman Catholic Church.
2. The Syrian Catholic Church: Those members of the Syrian Orthodox Church who united with the Roman Catholic Church.
3. The Latin Church.
4. The Greek Catholic Church

IV. The Protestant Churches
1. The national evangelical Church.
2. The Assyrian evangelical Church.
3. The Armenian Evangelical Church.
4. The Lutheran Eastern Church.
5. The seven day Adventist Church.
6. Assemblies of God.
7. The evangelical spiritual brethren.
8. Other small groups

V. The Anglican Church
Mainly constitutes the British Christians who live in Iraq.

VI. The Coptic Church

VI. The Greek Orthodox Church

Dr Suha Rassam

IRAQI CHURCH WEB RESOURCES

www.chaldeanvoice.org
www.kaldu.org
www.baqofa.com
www.marnarsay.com
www.chaldeandiocese.org
www.ichk.nl
www.st-adday.com
www.tebayn.com
www.bakhdida.net
www.dar-bait-anya.org

Letter to the Editor

Christians Tragedy in Iraq

From Mr M Hermez USA

In Iraq, many Christians have been massacred recently,in varies towns like Baghdad,Mosul, Basrah, and Kirkuk plus other places. thirty one martyrs between January 16th and May 24th 2007. Of course many others whom I don't know them as well as fourth times the number of injuries inflicted as a result. For Christians, this number is very high, but what can we do? Our churches have been destroyed and vandalised, our people are kidnapped on daily bases, our females are suffering from the new Islamic rules in many districts all over Iraq.

The will of God to sacrifice such valuable people distanced from our hearts. This situation is unbelievable and unimaginable, these victims are resting in the Gardens of Eternity with the Creator. they were faithful to their families and their friends. We are deeply saddened and distressed to remind them and ask them to the mercy and forgiveness of God, as well as ask for patience and fortitude to their families and loved once, God bless their souls Amen.

Every day at noon and again at 9 p.m., one of my friends, goes to the picture of his beloved son of twenty years, reads, prays, and talks to him, he said to me "I loved him so much", tears streaming down his face. Unfortunately, no memorial day for those who killed, most of them they served and love their country dearly!!

We are very sorry to say that "we're changed forever". Our tragedies have changed the families for ever. Please pray for them wherever you are, thank you.

[i] Gwendolyn Leick's "Mesopotamia: The Invention of the City" – pp 216-217
[ii] National Geography of December 2001. This reference is quoted by Michalowski in his article "Abraham, the Father of Three Faiths" – p 106

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